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DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CAR, WHA/EX, WHA/USOAS, AND A/PTS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [AORC](#) [AMGT](#) [KSUM](#) [TD](#)  
SUBJECT: SUMMIT OF AMERICA LOGISTICS: A RACE TO THE FINISH

Classified By: CDA Len Kusnitz; Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago is working hard on preparations for the April 17-19 Summit of the Americas, but it is somewhat behind schedule. The GOTT, however, has begun a concerted effort to pull off the event, now less than three months away. For its part, the public is enthusiastic about a possible visit by President Obama and Secretary Clinton, but skeptical about the cost of the event (and that of the later Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting) during a time of economic downturn. Picking up on this theme, the opposition is sniping at the government over the summits. End Summary.

Got to Move Fast  
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¶2. (C) The GOTT has been making preparations for the Summit for over a year, though only in the last 45 days or so has it begun to earnestly focus on logistical concerns. While it is preparing the Summit venues (relatively few in number) has contracted with cruise ship companies for additional lodging and hired an accreditation firm, other logistical aspects of the Summit are behind schedule. Some hotel reconstruction is still underway, the plan to use the old airport terminal to receive dignitaries and park their planes there remains just that -- a plan, and security issues are only now being grappled with.

¶3. (C) The Summit effort also has been hampered by personnel glitches and turf battles. In the first part of December, there was a shake-up on the security side, pushed through after a meeting of the Inter-Ministerial Committee charged with overseeing the Summit. Overall control of security was moved from the Summit Secretariat and centered in the National Security Ministry. Former National Security Adviser Joan Massiah, who had just moved to the Summit Secretariat in November, left as part of this shake-up. The central working level security contact at National Security, Commodore Best, is currently hospitalized for stress-related exhaustion, though expected to be back at work next week. The Foreign Ministry continues on the margins of the Summit declaration negotiations and logistical preparations, though the Minister does sit on the Inter-Ministerial Committee, chaired by the able Minister of State in the Finance Ministry Mariano Browne.

Canadians Concerned  
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¶4. (C/NF) Canadian High Commissioner Karen McDonald hosted a luncheon meeting January 20 with us to exchange Summit views. Although the Summit Secretariat is well staffed at the top levels, she opined, the mid-level support staff was insufficient, thus encouraging Summit coordinator Rodriguez to micromanage rather than delegate. In addition, few

contracts for supplies and other goods had been finalized, and some Canadian companies had withdrawn their bids because it was already too late to assure delivery. Despite all this, the HC was optimistic matters would work out and the Summit come off, especially as the Prime Minister is increasingly focused on the meeting. At a separate January 21 event the Argentine Ambassador also expressed frustration to us over the pace at which Summit logistics are advancing. Perhaps in response to some of these concerns, the GOTT has called a January 30 meeting for resident Embassies and any advance personnel that attend to discuss logistical and security concerns. (Note: The draft agenda seems to go over ground with which the USG is already familiar. We will be attending the session.)

#### Opposition Stoking Public Skepticism

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15. (C) Several editorials, letters to the editor and opposition politicians have questioned the value of the Summit and later Commonwealth meeting, asking what Trinidad is getting for the supposed \$80-100 million being spent on the events. The Summit Secretariat has told us it has a communications plan to highlight the value of the Summit/Commonwealth processes, but has been mostly on the defensive and has recently replaced its communications director. Its public relations woes were evident in the December beating the GOTT took over the procurement of 200 "luxury" vehicles for foreign dignitaries attending the meetings and in last week's brouhaha over whether the port would be closed for the two weeks around the Summit. In the latter instance, Public Works Minister Colm Imbert held a press conference and stated the port would be closed only April 17-19, and that cargo ships could be diverted to Point Lisas if necessary.

#### Behind, but running fast

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16. (C/NF) Comment: Summit preparations are behind schedule, including for the side fora (e.g. the business, youth and civil society meetings). That said, the GOTT knows that a failure to carry off the Summit successfully will damage its reputation at home and abroad and it is beginning to pull out all the stops as the clock ticks down. Most of our contacts, like the Canadian High Commissioner, believe the GOTT will find a way to piece it all together at the end of the day, though the run-up to the event will be stressful and glitches inevitable.  
KUSNITZ